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Items for information

Migration statistics

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report was prepared at the request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-seventh session.[a] It summarizes the activities of the United Nations Statistics Division on international migration statistics and reports on the outcome of the expert group meeting on international migration statistics held from 4 to 7 December 2006 in New York. The Commission is requested to take note of the report, which is submitted for information.

[a] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2006, Supplement No. 4* (E/2006/24), chap. I.B.

* E/CN.3/2007/1.

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I. Introduction

1. The Statistical Commission, at its thirty-seventh session, identified migration statistics as an agenda item for its thirty-eighth session. The present report concerns the work carried out by the United Nations Secretariat and its plans for 2007 and 2008 in the area of international migration statistics.

II. Data collection and dissemination

2. The United Nations Statistics Division collects statistics on international migration from more than 200 countries. The collection consists of two questionnaires: the Population census questionnaire, used for collecting data on migrant stock, is administered when a country is known to have conducted a census; and the Questionnaire on international migration and travel statistics, is sent out every year to collect data on migration flows.

3. The collection of data on international migration flows has two parts. The first part is data collection from the 56 countries that are members of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), through an intersecretariat arrangement with Eurostat, which sends out a joint questionnaire to those countries. The data are shared with participating institutions, namely the Statistics Division, Eurostat, the Council of Europe, ECE and the International Labour Office (ILO). The second part is collection from the remaining countries of the world through the Questionnaire on international migration and travel statistics.

4. Based on the results of the data collected from the Population census questionnaire, six tables pertaining to the migrant population have been made available on the Statistics Division website (http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/dybcens.htm). They include population by country of birth, population by country of citizenship and economically active foreign-born population by occupation. Most of the tables are tabulated by sex and age, for all countries for which data are available, from the 1990 and 2000 census rounds.

III. Meeting of the expert group on measuring international migration on the theme of concepts and methods

5. The Demographic and Social Statistics Branch of the Statistics Division convened a meeting of the expert group on measuring international migration with the theme of concepts and methods in New York from 4 to 7 December 2006. The meeting was organized in response to the need to improve statistics on international migration and to broaden the implementation of the United Nations recommendations, as contained in the *Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration, Revision 1*.[1]

6. The main objectives of the meeting were to (a) assess requirements for international migration statistics in response to policy interest and the challenges faced by national statistical systems in measuring international migration flows and stock; (b) review national practices in the compilation of migration statistics and identify difficulties associated with the recommended concepts and definitions;

[1] Statistical Papers, Series M, No. 58, Rev.1 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.98.XVII.5).

(c) explore ways to foster cooperation between the policy machineries of Governments and their data-collection agencies; and (d) on the basis of those assessments, determine the scope and content of a handbook on statistics on international migration to be prepared by the Statistical Division.

7. The meeting brought together experts on international migration and representatives of national statistical offices and immigration offices and of regional and international organizations. Participants included experts from 10 countries, four regional commissions, Eurostat, ILO, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Bank.

8. The meeting identified the following priority actions aimed at improving statistics on international migration:

(a) Provision of guidance and technical support on the use of censuses and sample surveys to measure aspects of international migration;

(b) Development of a handbook focusing on core topics, with case studies to clarify how various sources are used and/or combined by some countries;

(c) Training to develop national capacity to produce international migration statistics;

(d) Promotion of data-sharing and the use of other-country data for the estimation of emigration, drawing on experiences from the regional exchange of data;

(e) Creation of a technical group consisting of national statistical offices, immigration authorities, agencies of the United Nations system and other international organizations to support that work.

9. A copy of the recommendations of the meeting is attached for information in the annex.

IV. Workplan for 2007-2008

10. For 2007, the Demographic and Social Statistics Branch will disseminate on the Statistics Division website an interactive database on questions related to migration in the 2000 round of national population censuses.

11. For 2007, a technical report on measuring international migration through population censuses will be prepared to guide countries in their implementation of the 2010 round of population censuses. An expert group meeting is planned for 2007 to review the draft technical report.

12. A handbook on international migration statistics is scheduled for submission in 2008. That handbook will provide practical guidance on migrant flows and stock that can be captured using different sources of data, focusing on a core set of variables to measure international migration and providing examples of how countries have successfully used specific data sources or a combination of sources to measure migration.

13. An expert group meeting is planned for 2008 to review the draft handbook on international migration statistics.

Annex

Recommendations of the meeting of the expert group on measuring international migration with the theme of concepts and methods

1. As indicated during the High-level Dialogue on International Migration, which was convened by the General Assembly on 14 and 15 September 2006, demand for policy-relevant statistics on international migration is increasing. However, because the sources of these data are not sufficiently developed, national Governments and international bodies are unable to provide the comprehensive assessment needed. Meanwhile, the *Recommendations for International Migration Statistics, Revision 1*,[a] are not being widely applied. The meeting considered that a concerted effort was needed to improve international migration statistics and identified the following priority actions:

(a) Provision of guidance and technical support on the use of censuses and sample surveys to measure aspects of international migration;

(b) Development of a handbook focusing on core variables and using case studies to clarify how various sources can be used and/or combined to measure international migration;

(c) Training to develop national capacity to produce international migration statistics;

(d) Promotion of data-sharing and the use of other-country immigration data for the estimation of emigration, drawing on experiences from the regional exchange of data;

(e) Creation of a technical group consisting of national statistical offices, immigration authorities, agencies of the United Nations system and other international organizations to support that work.

A. Enhancement of the 1998 recommendations

2. To improve implementation of the *1998 Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration*, the definition of international migrant and related concepts should be made more operational. Practical guidance should be provided on how to measure migrant flows and migrant stocks using different sources of data. It is recommended that the Statistics Division produce a handbook on methodology that will:

(a) Identify core variables;

(b) Clarify the philosophy and concepts used and review definitions where necessary;

(c) Provide examples from countries;

(d) Provide guidelines on required tabulations.

[a] Statistical Papers, No. 58, Rev.1 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.98.XVII.14).

B. Sources of data

3. Statistics on international migration come from different sources including registers and other administrative sources, censuses and sample surveys. It is often necessary to combine data from different sources to produce them.

Administrative sources

4. To enhance the availability of administrative data in measuring international migrant stock and international migration flows, several actions are required at the national and international levels.

5. National statistical offices should:

(a) Establish and/or maintain a dialogue and work closely with the producers of administrative data, including departments of home (internal) affairs, ministries of the interior, immigration services;

(b) To the extent possible, urge the suppliers of administrative data to publish and disseminate relevant data, including metadata;

(c) Be familiar with the rules and regulations governing the control and management of international migration and their enforcement.

6. To facilitate communication the Statistics Division and the regional commissions should support collaborative meetings at the regional level between suppliers of administrative data and national statistics offices. Moreover, suppliers of administrative data should be included in future deliberations at the regional and interregional levels.

Population censuses

7. Data collected from the population census are an essential benchmark for the improvement of basic international migration statistics. The 2010 round offers an opportunity to collect more harmonized international migration data, specifically on the migrant stock. To ensure that the 2010 round of censuses will produce the expected outcome, the following actions are recommended:

(a) The United Nations Population Fund and the Statistics Division, in collaboration with the regional commissions and other relevant organizations, should prepare advocacy material for use by countries to promote the use of population censuses to measure migration;

(b) The Statistics Division and the regional commissions should provide technical guidance on how to collect international migration data in the 2010 census round. Such guidance would include methodological materials, training workshops and technical assistance to countries;

(c) Countries should collect data on both country of birth and country of citizenship and present them cross-tabulated with sex and age. Data collection on additional topics to identify foreign background may be considered by countries that require a more comprehensive picture of migration stock;

(d) Population censuses should also attempt to systematically enumerate refugees and asylum-seekers in their total counts.

Sample surveys

8. Countries should explore the possibility of using sample surveys to collect data on international migration, especially for those aspects for which no other sources are available.

C. Data compilation and dissemination

9. The analysis and dissemination of data are effective advocacy tools and should be employed to encourage policymakers to support their collection and use.

10. While there was progress in the availability of administrative data and in including migration-related questions in the census questionnaires, many countries do not publish the collected data or do not publish them in a timely fashion. Countries should be encouraged to tabulate and disseminate key migration data from the census and other sources in a timely fashion. The electronic processing of data allows an acceleration of the process and an increase in the level of detail of the disseminated data.

11. International organizations collecting international migration data should make such data available, together with the relevant metadata, in a comprehensive and timely fashion. For that to be possible, countries should provide such metadata (including specific source, definition, method of collection and criteria used to identify migrant). The United Nations should give clear guidance to countries on the level of detail required for the metadata.

12. The meeting noted the low response rate in the United Nations collection of international migration statistics. Although it was felt that that was primarily due to non-availability of data in accordance with the definition and form required by the United Nations, the Organization should be more proactive in its interactions with countries, providing them with feedback and information on what has been received and seeking clarifications when required.

13. The Statistics Division should also:

(a) Review and simplify its existing data request, in light of policy demands, and design its international migration questionnaires with due regard for existing sources of data and needs for information on both immigration and emigration;

(b) Publish migration data as soon as possible and develop an interactive database on its website to enable external users to extract data on international migration in a user-friendly manner.

D. Data-sharing and exchange

14. There is a lack of information on emigration in many countries. Such information is important for sending countries; therefore, special efforts should be made by countries to develop strategies to collect the information. Data may be collected through censuses, sample surveys or administrative sources.

15. There is a need for comparable statistics to facilitate the sharing of information. In that regard, national statistical offices should make an effort to

ensure that nationally available administrative migration data conform with the United Nations recommendations.

16. The meeting noted the potential value of other countries' immigration data to estimates of emigration, but considered that viable data-sharing and exchange were still remote. It is necessary to document experiences and outcomes of current data exchange initiatives and to build on them.

17. Possibilities for data exchange (like that done on the foreign-born population or foreign nationals in some regions) should be explored. In that regard, relevant requirements for the adoption of protocols and/or memorandums of understanding should be assessed, particularly at the regional level, with the involvement of the regional commissions.

E. Capacity-building

18. The Statistics Division, regional commissions, funds and programmes and other regional organizations, should continue supporting workshops in relevant regions to develop national capacity.

19. The Statistics Division, United Nations regional commissions, funds and programmes and other regional organizations, should consider supporting joint measurement/enumeration projects in countries that share a permeable border.

F. Working mechanism

20. The Statistics Division should set up a technical group consisting of national statistical offices, immigration authorities, United Nations agencies and other international organizations to advance the measurement of international migration. Such a technical group would provide inputs to the preparation of the handbook, study the feasibility of data exchange, facilitate training activities and recommend approaches to estimating certain segments or categories of international migration, using a specific source or a combination of sources.